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Tom Ross a Steady Hand During Era of Tremendous Change

RALEIGH (Jan. 19, 2015) – Tom Ross will step down as President of the University of North Carolina system at the end of 2015, but his reserved judicial temperament has been a stabilizing force for the University system at a time of tremendous change.

Over the past four years, Ross has managed the University system through significant transitions and *very* difficult times.

At a time when the workplace demands an educated workforce, Ross presided over an increase of more than 20% in the number of degrees the university system awards, despite more than \$500 million in budget cuts from the state. He also found efficiencies that led to a 17% reduction in cost per degree.

The University system also has become one of the leading providers of online education. More than 21,000 students are fully online, and almost 40% of all students took at least one online class last year.

The chairman of the UNC Board of Governors called Ross a terrific president. “This board believes Tom Ross has been a wonderful president – fantastic work ethic, perfect integrity, worked well with our board,” said John Fennebresque, the chairman of the board, as he announced Friday that Ross will step down at the end of the year.

Ross’s looming departure adds uncertainty at a time of great change in higher education, raising questions about the direction of public higher education in North Carolina. The selection process by the Board of Governors and the President the board chooses will affect the University’s ability to attract and keep quality faculty, students, researchers and administrators.

The President should be a recognized leader who understands and values North Carolina’s commitment to providing quality higher education at an affordable price. He or she should be someone who commands respect from the many constituencies in higher education, and who embraces innovation in education.

Higher Education Works looks forward to supporting the efforts of the Board of Governors and the new President to keep the promise of providing higher education to North Carolinians.

As Ross said at the announcement of his departure, the University plays a vital role as an economic driver for North Carolina.

“This is the oldest public university in America. It’s among the best – if not *the* best – public university in America,” he said. “I believe this University is one of our greatest assets.”

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Higher Education Works is a nonpartisan group that advocates for public investment in The University of North Carolina and Community College systems by building support among citizens and engaging leaders. Our State’s systems of public higher education must continue to distinguish North Carolina from other states. For more information, visit <http://www.highereducationworks.org/>.

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